

Wildfire preparations update for FRSC

A wildfire is defined as any uncontrolled vegetation fire where a decision or action is needed about its suppression. A wildfire will meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Involves a geographical area of at least one hectare (10,000 square metres)
- Has a sustained flame length of more than 1.5 metres
- Requires a committed resource of at least four fire and rescue service appliances/resources
- Requires resources to be committed for at least six hours
- Presents a serious threat to life, environment, property and infrastructure

Historically the UK has experienced periodic severe wildfire seasons. These seasons have tended to coincide with extended periods of warm and dry weather, and have sometimes been accompanied by high winds. The risk of wildfires is also affected by the size, condition and dryness of the fuel. Increased rainfall before warm, dry periods can cause rapid vegetation growth that can increase the risk of wildfires when the vegetation later dries. These are the conditions that provide the ideal environment for the development and spread of large and destructive wildfires.

Wildfires can be particularly challenging incidents for fire and rescue services to deal with because of their erratic nature, their potential size, scale and intensity and because of the rural and rural-urban interface environments in which they tend to occur. Large wildfires can be very resource intensive and this can create challenges for fire and rescue services in maintaining operational resilience and emergency cover.

Within the County of Gloucestershire, the most significant area of risk of wildfire is the Forest of Dean.

The Forest of Dean is a geographical, historical and cultural region in the western part of the county of Gloucestershire. The forest is a roughly triangular plateau bounded by the west and north, the River Severn to the South, and the City of Gloucester to the East.

The area is characterized by over 110 square kilometers (42.5 sq. miles) of mixed woodland, one of the surviving ancient woodlands in England.

Gloucestershire Fire & Rescue Service has plans in place to respond to a wildfire in this area should one occur.

Information

The Service has drawn up a tactical plan - Forest of Dean WILDFIRE. This provides comprehensive information for responders on –

- Initial actions and considerations
- Forest HVP (High Volume Pumping) Sectors and pumping plans
- Risks and hazards
- Water sources
- Operating procedures
- Tactical considerations

- Environmental considerations
- Forest of Dean infrastructure information – hospitals and schools, manufacturing and commercial

Supporting information is also provided for our incident commanders via Resilience Direct and includes the FOD Water Maps and River mapping, in addition to the higher level Local resilience Forum plan for Adverse Weather.

Resources

Our fire station infrastructure within the Forest of Dean area comprises –

Lydney Community Fire Station – 2 appliances plus 4x4

Coleford Community Fire Station – 2 appliances plus 4x4

Cinderford Community Fire Station – 2 appliances plus 4x4 forest access/firefighting vehicle

Newent Community Fire Station – 1 appliance plus Unimog all-terrain access vehicle

All are familiar with the tactical plan and have local knowledge of the area. In addition, supporting assets from across the Service could be mobilized including the bulk water/foam carrier and high volume pumping.

We have an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) in place with Gloucestershire Constabulary to access their drone (UAV) assets that would provide aerial images to aid situational awareness for responders on the ground.

In November 2021, 13 flexi-duty officers attended a two day Wildfire Awareness course run by National Resilience/Northumbria Fire & Rescue Service and the intention is to train an additional 4 officers to become national tactical advisors on wildfires and so provide a 24/7 resource.

Prevention and Protection

Our Community Safety Team have been proactive in getting messaging out around the issue of wildfires across all social media platforms in an effort to promote safety to homeowners and visitors to the Forest of Dean

The business fire safety team have been engaging with commercial organisations and industrial companies within the area to promote good fire safety messaging and behaviors in an effort to minimize the risk.